

The BP&J Interurban Railroad



Bloomington, Pontiac & Joliet Electric Railway

1902 – 1925

By: Dale C. Maley

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The company is Chartered - 1902

- Chartered December 30, 1902 under Illinois law
- Organized in Pontiac with local capital stock of \$100,000
 - Equivalent to \$3.8 million in today's dollars
- Promoted by Pontiac businessmen led by J. A. Carrithers of Pontiac Light & Water Co.
- Original plan: Interurban line from Bloomington to Joliet

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Incorporators:

- J.A. Carrithers – President of Pontiac Light & Water Co.
- Fred L. Lucas – Chief Instigator
- John S. Murphy, Clark E. Legg, A. M. Legg
- William F. VanBuskirk, David S. Myers, Eden M. Johnson, A. C. Folsom (All from Pontiac)

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

1st Board of Directors in 1902

- Carrithers, Murphy, the two Leggs
- Myers, Johnson, McWilliams
- Joseph S. Covey and B. F. Harber

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Construction Begins – 1904

- Rails laid first from Pontiac through Cayuga to Odell
- Later extended north to Dwight
- Overhead trolley cars operated between Pontiac and Dwight for years
- Line was graded from Pontiac south beyond Chenoa, culverts put in but no rails
 - BP&J stopped at Pontiac, never ran south to Chenoa

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

1st Interurban car arrived in 1905

- Named “The Dwight” arrived Feb. 3, 1905



The BP&J Interurban Railroad

1st Run – March 15, 1905

- 1st regular interurban run made from Pontiac to Odell
- On March 17, Mayor S. A. Rathbun appointed a committee of Alderman
- Over 100 passengers carried on the 1st day
- Average of 200 passengers per day in 1st ten days

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Pride of the BP&J Fleet

- “The Pontiac” arrived July 19, 1905
- Two similar overhead trolley cars shown below



- Brick road by Historic Courthouse
- Tracks cut-in and below top of brick road
- Still horse and auto traffic

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Route through Pontiac:

- Main office at 221 W. Washington Street
- Route ran across Interurban bridge east on Washington St.
- Tracks ran north on Main Street past the old high school
- Southern terminus at northwest corner of Boys Reformatory (Later Pontiac Prison)

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Historic Interurban Bridge

- The BP&J ran through Pontiac to a turn-around at the Boy's Reformatory
- Bridge crossed the Vermilion river near flood stage

any photo ?

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Summer of 1905

- 29 passenger trains or interurbans stopping in Pontiac daily
- Chicago & Alton operated 13 passenger trains through each day
- Illinois Central had four trains here each day

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

“Bump, Push and Jerk”

- The BP&J became the butt of many jokes
- Aquired nickname from its initials and obvious references to its operation
- Officially: Bloomington, Pontiac & Joliet
- Locals called it: “Bump, Push and Jerk”
- Fun Fact: BP&J never ran to either Bloomington or Joliet even though its name was Bloomington, Pontiac & Joliet

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Popular Excursions

- Excursions, especially for picnics and chautauqua events were common
- A dance hall at Interurban Park attracted many persons
- Pontiac vs. Odell baseball games drew whole teams and fans boarding the BP&J cars

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

BP&J Car at Odell



BP&J Car #201 – a key stop along the Pontiac to Dwight route

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Car Barn Location

- Located on northeast edge of Pontiac near the Illinois Central, Wabash, and Alton Railroads
- Near Spartan foundry, J. P. McMurray Canning Company
- Close to the old coal mine

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Interurban Operators – 1922

- A. W. Lehman (motorman) and Charles Anderson (conductor)
- Mrs. Agnes E. Sells was superintendent

Chartered in 1902.

The Bloomington, Pontiac and Joliet Railway company was chartered by the state Dec. 30, 1902, with capital stock of \$100,000.

The incorporators were Carothers, Lucas, John S. Murphy, Clark E. Legg, A. M. Legg, William F. VanBuskirk, David S. Myers, Ed- den M. Johnson and A. C. Folsom, all of Pontiac; J. McWilliams, Jr., Odell; two Lexington men and one Bloomington man.

The first board of directors was composed of Carothers, Murphy, the two Leggs, Myers, Johnson, McWilliams, Joseph S. Corey and B. F. Harber.

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Company Sold to Larger Interests

- BP&J sold to Fisher interests in Joliet
- Sold again, effective March 1, 1913, along with other Pontiac utilities
- Purchased by Public Service Corporation of Chicago
- Sale price understood to be \$750,000
 - Equivalent to \$2.48 million in today's dollars

Route Map

[illegible]

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

add timeline 1908 Model T

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Automobile Era Arrives

- Automobiles and buses cut heavily into BP&J passenger traffic
- The BP&J Interurban was finally abandoned in 1925
- In it's 20 years of operation, it was an important factor in lives of area residents

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Last Run of the BP&J – November 25, 1925

- Mrs. Agnes E. Sells, superintendent, announced the last car would leave Pontiac at 5:15 PM
- Return at 7:30 PM on November 25, 1925
- Interurban employees given other positions with the Public Service company

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

End of the Line

- After the line was dismantled, rails were taken up, and cars burned – November 25, 1925

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The Legacy Remains

- The patches on Pontiac streets where the tracks were removed were visibly evident for many years after 1925 closure
- The old Interurban bridge stood for many more years
- Flood of July 1951 did wash out portion of the bridge
- The rail era in local transportation gave way to the booming automobile era

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Worst Week – August 4, 1907

- Sunday evening at 5:30 PM – two cars collided
- Crowded with people attending ball game and Chautauqua
- Lead car stopped at crossing about one mile south of Odell
- Motorman Bassin claimed brakes failed on second car

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Power Plant Disaster – January 1906

- Thursday morning, January 25, 1906 – crankshaft of 500 Hp engine snapped !
- Recent sleet storm caused heavy electrical strain on the system
- Ice and sleet blamed for numerous short circuit problems
- Flywheel twisted in such a manner that it tore the building into pieces.

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Complete Shutdown

- Not only railway down, but plant was city's power source
- Nobody had any electricity
- Over \$5,000 damage to equipment and building on Vermilion River
- Luck Break: Westinghouse had identical engine in stock in Pittsburgh

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Service Restored – February 17, 1906

- Service restored at noon on Saturday, Feb. 17th, 1906
- Was down for ~23 days
- Special car ran in morning for VIPs and invited guests
- Car “Dwight” left Pontiac at 9:10 AM and arrived at Dwight at 9:45 AM
- All along the run, people welcomed the car

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

The BP&J Interurban Railroad

Tragedy at Odell Crossing

- * Four people killed, a dozen others injured
- * Against rules for passengers to ride front vestibule with motorman, but it was full
- * Coroner's inquest: Bassin was following lead car too close
- * Unable to stop in time; Bassin also hurt with broken leg and internal injuries

Service Disrupted After Wreck

- ✧ Both cars had vestibule damage; could be repaired but out of service
- ✧ Company only had two cars · not sufficient to handle crowds
- ✧ Had contract with post office for mail run
- ✧ Steam engine made mail run; resumed Tuesday afternoon August 7, 1907 using car rented from Illinois Traction System

The Chautauqua Events

- ✧ Chautauqua assemblies held in Riverside Park on Vermillion River
- ✧ Near 916 Wabash River bridge
- ✧ Widely advertised · attracted people from all over
- ✧ Park became site of temporary town during Chautauqua season

Fisher Interests Take Over - November 1907

- ✧ November 1907: BP&J sold to Fisher syndicate of Joliet
- ✧ New officers: E.A. Fisher (president), D.S. Myers (vice president)
- ✧ J.K. Newhall (secretary), L.Q. Paine (treasurer), F.E. Fisher (general manager)

Expansion Plans to Bloomington

- ✧ First thing Fishers wanted: extend road south to Bloomington
- ✧ Public meeting held in Chenoa (10 miles south of Pontiac)
- ✧ Extension to Bloomington and north to Joliet would be conditional
- ✧ People of cities along route would need to subscribe to percentage of bonds

The Chenoa Extension - 1909

- ✧ Construction to Chenoa opened July 1, 1909
- ✧ Track completed via Washington Street south
- ✧ Company built own right-of-way and single track bridge across river
- ✧ Extension was about one mile to prison area

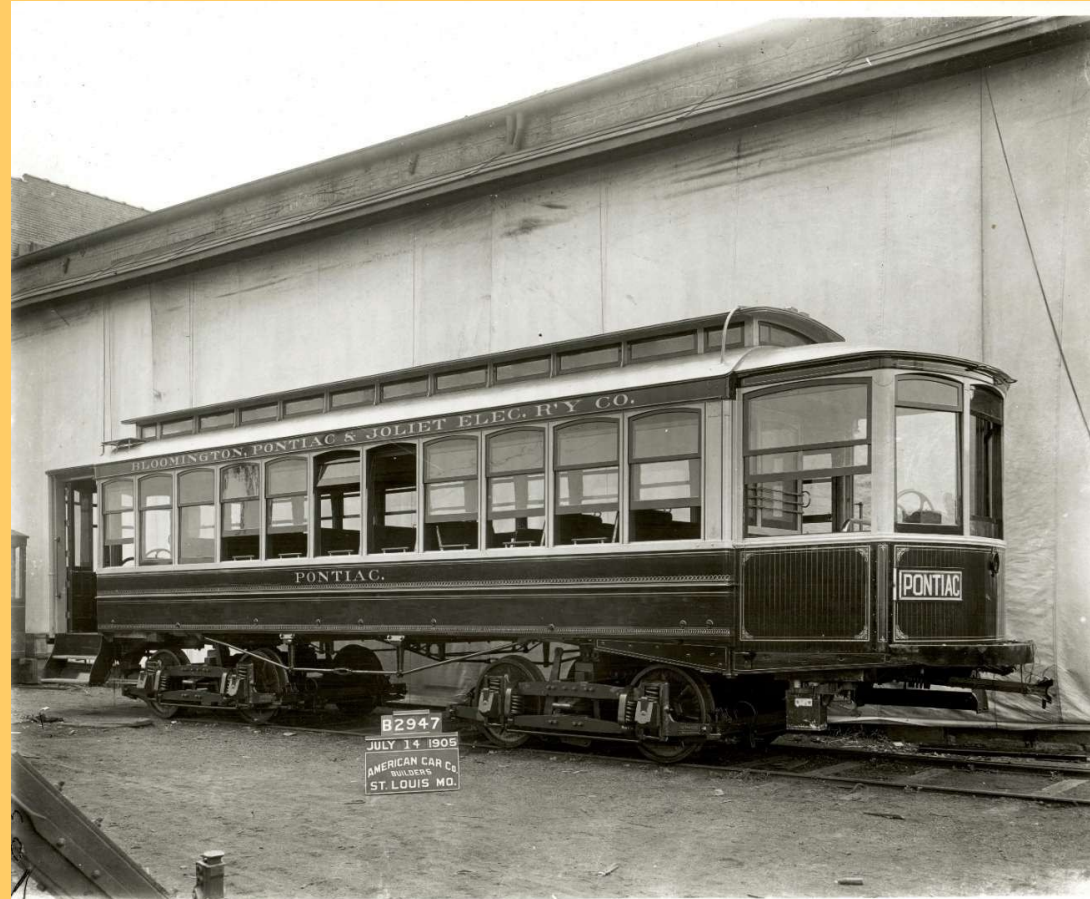
Money Runs Out

- ✧ Work continued to Chenoa through 1909 and into 1910
- ✧ All grading complete along with culverts, bridges, etc.
- ✧ Ready for installation of rails and overhead wire
- ✧ However, money ran out · never completed to Chenoa

The "Jitney" City Car

- ✧ July 1913: secondhand city car purchased in Chicago
- ✧ Put in service August 1, 1913 for local service in Pontiac
- ✧ 2-mile run from prison through business district to car house
- ✧ Commonly called "Jitney" because of 5¢ fare

Car Interior View



Interior view of BP&J car showing passenger seating arrangements

BP&J Car on Pontiac Streets



BP&J car navigating Pontiac city streets, July 14, 1905

The Jitney Never Profitable

- ✧ Taken off in winter of 1922
- ✧ Best year was 1917: averaged only 140 passengers per day
- ✧ Last full year 1921: less than half that, about 60 passengers daily
- ✧ Just an isolated section with little traffic potential

Passenger Statistics 1916-1922

- * 1916: 49,087 passengers
- * 1917: 51,009 (peak year)
- * 1918: 41,510
- * 1919: 35,911
- * 1920: 27,710
- * 1921: 21,084
- * 1922: 13,714 (last year before closing)

July 1917 Timetable

B. P. & J. ELECTRIC R'Y---TIME TABLE										
NORTH BOUND.										
	AM	AM	AM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM
Lv. Reformatory..	5:40	8:25	10:30	12:30	3:15	5:15	7:15	9:30	11:30	
Pontiac	5:45	8:30	10:35	12:35	3:20	5:20	7:20	9:35	11:38	
Nolan	6:00	8:45	10:48	12:48	3:33	5:33	7:33	9:48	11:48	
Cayuga	6:05	8:50	10:53	12:53	3:38	5:38	7:38	9:53	11:53	
Interurban Pk	6:15	9:00	11:00	1:00	3:48	5:48	7:48	10:03	12:03	
Odell	6:21	9:06	11:05	1:05	3:54	5:54	7:54	10:10	12:10	
Viriden	6:22	9:13	11:12	1:12	4:01	6:01	8:01	10:17	12:17	
Rilling	6:35	9:20	11:18	1:18	4:08	6:08	8:08	10:23	12:23	
Ar. Dwight	6:45	9:30	11:25	1:25	4:15	6:15	8:15	10:30	12:30	
First morning car makes connection with all trains out of Dwight										
SOUTH BOUND.										
	AM	AM	AM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	AM
Lv. Dwight	7:30	9:30	11:25	2:15	4:15	6:15	8:30	10:30	12:30	
Rilling	7:37	9:37	11:32	2:22	4:22	6:22	8:37	10:37	12:37	
Viriden	7:42	9:42	11:37	2:27	4:27	6:27	8:42	10:42	12:42	
Odell	7:50	9:50	11:45	2:35	4:35	6:35	8:50	10:50	12:50	
Interurban Pk	7:55	9:55	11:50	2:40	4:40	6:40	8:55	10:55	12:55	
Cayuga	8:03	10:03	11:58	2:48	4:48	6:48	9:05	11:05	1:05	
Nolan	8:07	10:08	12:03	2:53	4:53	6:53	9:10	11:10	1:10	
Pontiac	8:20	10:25	12:18	3:10	5:10	7:10	9:25	11:25	1:25	
Ar. Reformatory..	8:25	10:30	12:23	3:15	5:15	7:15	9:30	11:30	1:30	
JULY 1917										

BP&J Electric Railway timetable from July 1917 showing stops and schedules

1917 Schedule Details

- * Stops included: Reformatory, Pontiac, Nolan, Cayuga, Interurban Park, Odell, Virden, Riling, Dwight
- * Eight daily trips in each direction
- * First morning car made connection with all trains out of Dwight
- * Travel time: approximately 30 minutes from Pontiac to Odell

The Great Blizzard - January 1918

- ✧ Worst storm: January 12-13, 1918
- ✧ Pontiac completely isolated for 60 hours
- ✧ 2-foot drift covered all railroad tracks and highways
- ✧ BP&J Electric Railway down almost a week

Important Role in Community

- ✧ When started in 1905, few automobiles · dusty paths as only roads
- ✧ People accustomed to travel by train or interurban
- ✧ Almost no bad weather when cars didn't run
- ✧ Road gave good service for 20 years

Historical Photo Gallery

Rare images and documents from the BP&J archives

[illegible]

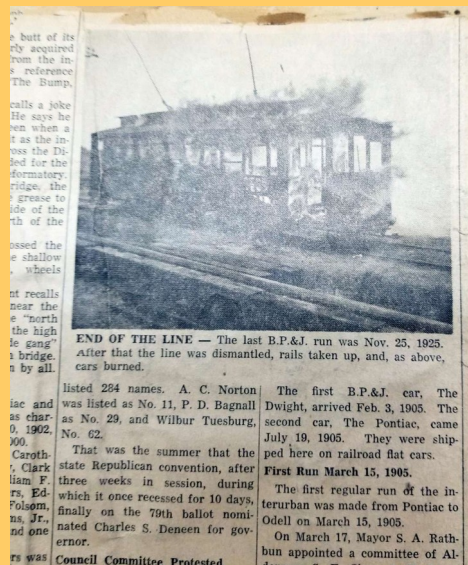
carrier

The first car to arrive was the Dwight car, followed by the Pontiac car a few weeks later. These cars were the same size and were used between the cities. They were most

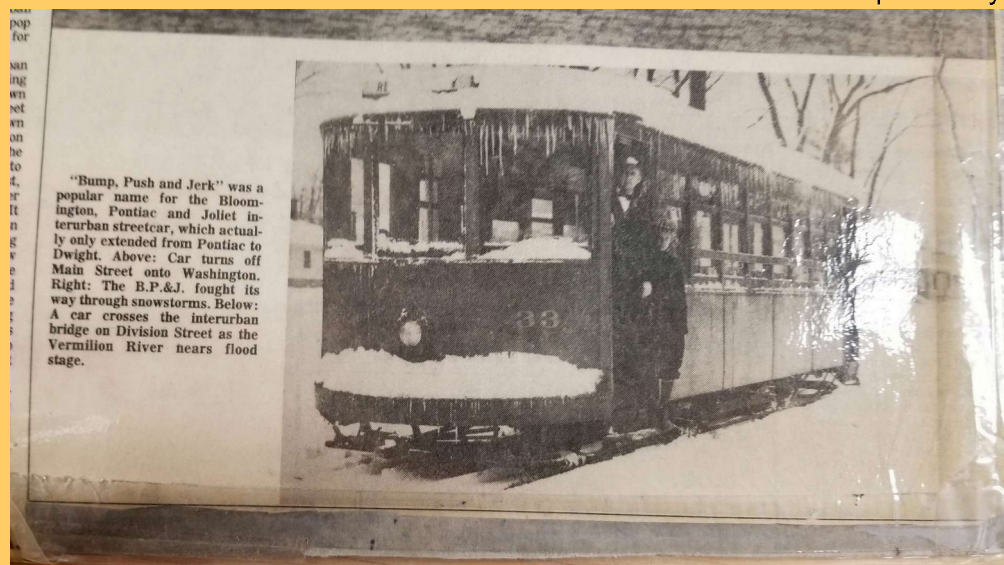
Beyond the park, the Interurban traveled through Cayuga entering Pontiac on the north side of town where the tracks and Aurora Street intersect. It then traveled down Aurora to Wabash and south to Main. It followed Main past the Interurban office at 214 N. Main to Washington where it turned west passing the Interurban passenger station at 721 W. Washington St. It followed Washington to Division Street where it turned south crossing the river where the footbridge is now located at Humiston-Riverside Park. At Lincoln Street it turned

line terminated. The concrete along Lincoln Street covers the remnants of the line. Tracks were laid to Ocova but the line never was

Infrastructure & Equipment



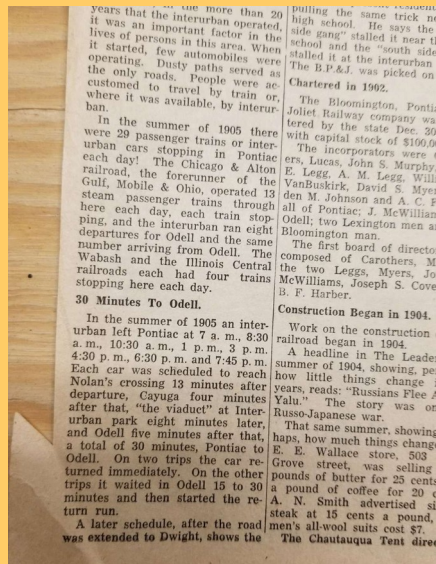
Track and power systems



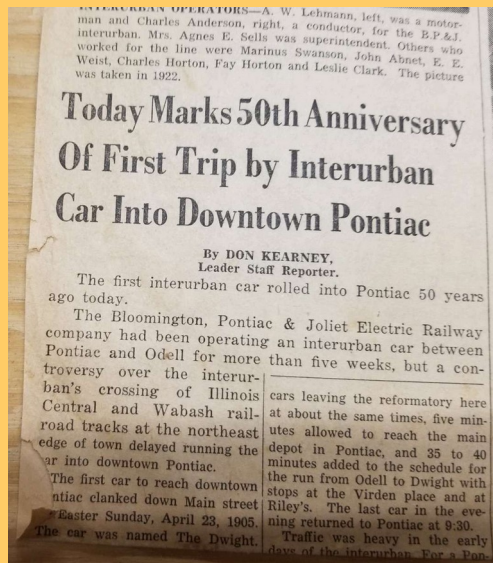
Equipment details



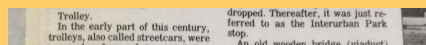
Service & Operations Documentation



Service announcements



Operational updates



Historical Articles & Records

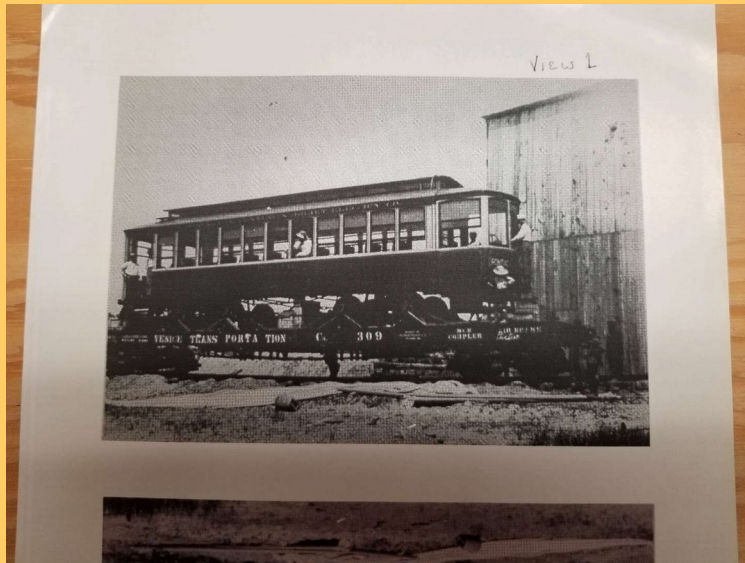


Period documentation

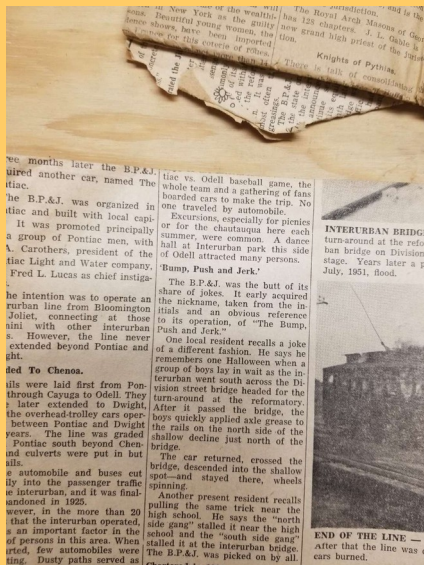


Archival materials

Construction & Expansion Era



Construction period



Route expansion plans



CONTENTS

Community documentation

Price, 1st, between Mill and Madison
third, 25

Archival Sources

- * Historical photographs courtesy of Art Peterson collection
- * Newspaper articles from Pontiac Daily Leader archives
- * Livingston County Historical Society records
- * James J. Buckley research materials (1982)

All materials preserved at [Archive.org](https://archive.org)

Questions?

Livingston County Historical Society